

ON THE SIGNIFICANCE AND RESEARCH POTENTIAL OF THE GREBIETEN BURIAL GROUND: A RECONSTRUCTION OF THE PREWAR STATE OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE PROSPECTS FOR MODERN RESEARCH

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Abstract

The Grebieten burial ground, situated in the former Kreis Fischhausen of the German Empire's province of East Prussia, (currently in the Zelenogradskii district of the Kaliningrad oblast', Russian Federation), represents a reference monument of Sambian-Natangian culture, and at the same time is one of its best investigated archaeological sites. However, a recent comparative analysis of the available sources of information showed that the modern state of knowledge is incomplete, while the research potential of the monument is far from being exhausted. This article gives an overview of the state of research, as well as of the open questions and gaps in our knowledge. Along with a description of the currently available sources of information and their limitations, the publication informs readers about recently conducted archaeological studies, performed both on the partially preserved prewar archaeological material and on the monument. Besides the actual reintroduction of Grebieten into scientific research, the authors point out its role and its significance in the much more complex archaeological context. The results of recent research suggest strongly that the Grebieten burial ground is part of a much larger complex of archaeological monuments situated along the western coast of the Sambian Peninsula, in the close vicinity of amber collecting areas. This settlement complex played an important role in the collection and trade in amber, which defined the nature of Sambian-Natangian culture in the Roman Iron Age and Migration Period. Further multilateral investigations of the Grebieten burial ground should lead to a clearer view of the settlement system, the social structure, everyday life and contacts of the population of Sambia in the Roman Iron Age.

Key words: Grebieten, Sambian-Natangian culture, burial ground, amber trade, settlement system, Königsberg's Prussia Museum.

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Introduction

In the Roman Iron Age and Migration Period, the modern Kaliningrad oblast' of Russia, the central part of the former German province of East Prussia, was the area of Sambian-Natangian culture, also known as Dollkeim-Kovrovo culture. Archaeological research in the area has a complicated history: the investigations in the material culture which went on in the 19th and the first half of the 20th century slowed down significantly in the period from the end of the Second World War to the 1990s. The current renewal of interest in Sambian-Natangian culture and its archaeological heritage calls for a possibly full reconstruction of the prewar state of research, and its subsequent accomplishment through the archaeological results of recent decades. That said, a detailed analysis of prewar material often reveals that its current state of documentation and publication does not meet modern scientific research requirements, and thus its additional reinvestigation and reassessment are necessary. This tendency results in readdressing research topics which play a fundamental role in un-

derstanding the principal socio-historical tendencies of the development of Sambian-Natangian culture.

In the Late Roman Iron Age and Migration Period, the collection and trade in amber were some of the most important factors which determined the formation and development of Sambian-Natangian culture, and its interaction with other archaeological cultures in the Baltic Sea basin and with more remote regions of Europe. The amber trade also determined the main contacts of Sambian-Natangian culture, and, as a result, the cultural influences it experienced (Skvortsov 2012, 171ff., 2013b, 360ff.). The amber trade with the Roman Empire and the Germanic neighbours underpinned the prosperity of Sambian-Natangian culture, which is reflected in the richness and the composition of the grave inventories of the above-mentioned historical periods.

A large number of burial grounds from the Roman Iron Age and Migration Period, which contain Roman imports and grave goods of high social status, are located in the western part of the Sambian Peninsula. In full agreement with this, the west (and north) coast of the peninsula is known as an area where large amounts of

amber can be collected without substantial effort, especially after storms. It is natural to assume that ancient centres (whatever form they could have taken), which mediated the amber trade between Sambia and one of the centres of Wiebark culture on the Elbling Upland (Okulicz-Kozaryn 1992, 104ff.; Natuniewicz-Sekula, Okulicz-Kozaryn 2008, 227; Skvortsov 2012, 175, 2013a, 36ff.), were also located in this part of the peninsula. Preliminary results of a modern analysis of the existing archaeological data imply that the biggest and most significant of the four assumed centres of administration and power which are believed to exist on Sambia in the period discussed was probably situated near the burial ground at Grebieten, Kreis Fischhausen (today Okunevo, Zelenogradskii district) (Skvortsov 2014; Efremov, Skvortsov 2017, forthcoming).¹ That said, it should be mentioned that the main goal of this article is not to make a detailed report on recent research, but to reintroduce the Grebieten burial ground into the scientific research, give a general overview of the prewar research results and the currently existing research potential of the monument, and to present the main directions for its future investigation in a broad archaeological context.

The significance of Grebieten in the local archaeological context

The Grebieten burial ground is believed to be one of the most investigated and best-documented archaeological monuments in the area of Sambian-Natangian culture. While this is true, if we compare Grebieten with most archaeological monuments of Sambian-Natangian culture, the actual state of research of the monument is, as is shown below, very incomplete.

The importance of Grebieten in the local context of Sambian-Natangian culture can only be compared with that of the contemporary burial ground at Dollkeim, Kreis Fischhausen (today Kovrovo, Zelenogradskii district). Both monuments share common characteristics, such as the large area, the high number of burials, and often rich grave inventories with numerous grave goods. These burial fields were in use for a long period of time (approximately 1,000 years or longer) (Kulakov 2007, 83ff.; Skvortsov 2014), and thus have a crucial importance for an understanding of the general tendencies in the development of Sambian-Natangian culture. The results of the prewar investigation of both Dollkeim and Grebieten played a key role in the creation of the classification of local prehistoric artefacts,

that is, of the chronological system developed by Otto Tischler (Tischler 1879; Tischler, Kemke 1902), which soon after its appearance revealed itself to be of great importance, not only in the local East Prussian context, but also in the northern and Central European context. However, while the burial ground at Dollkeim even gave its name to the archaeological culture described, which is often referred to in the West European literature as Dollkeim-Kovrovo culture, the burial ground at Grebieten has up to now, to a certain extent, stood in its shadow, and is currently much less well known to modern researchers and scholars of prehistory.

A further difference between Grebieten and Dollkeim concerns the modern state of their preservation. Archaeological investigations of the burial ground at Dollkeim continued in the Russian research period (Kulakov 2007, 2009a). Unfortunately, at approximately the same time, the burial ground started to be destroyed by the rapidly growing modern cemetery. Also, the speed and the rate of its plunder by 'poacher-archaeologists' in the last 20 to 25 years have been extremely high. These two factors resulted in the current high degree of destruction of this archaeological monument. The burial ground at Grebieten, fortunately, suffered to a much lesser extent. No further investigations were performed on the monument until recently (see below). While in Soviet times it was a ploughed field, nowadays it is wasteland. Although numerous traces of illegal excavations have been detected on the monument in recent years, its overall state of preservation is fundamentally better than that at Dollkeim, so that the burial ground at Grebieten preserves its great research importance and potential. Another important consideration is the state of preservation of the collection of prewar finds from the burial grounds of Dollkeim and Grebieten. While only a few artefacts from the burial ground at Dollkeim survived in the remnants of the Prussia collection in Berlin (stored in the Museum of Ancient and Early History, MVF SMB PK²), in Kaliningrad (the Kaliningrad Regional Museum of History and Art, KOIHM) and in Olsztyn (the Museum of Warmia and Masuria, Olsztyn, [MWM]), at least 1,241 artefacts from Grebieten are still in the Berlin part of the collection, MVF). Further prewar finds from Grebieten are preserved in the mentioned Olsztyn and Kaliningrad museums. Thus, it is obvious that Grebieten represents an archaeological monument with primary research significance, while further and more detailed investigations are of great importance for understanding many aspects of Sambian-Natangian culture.

¹ It should also be mentioned that thick layers of 'blue earth' containing amber are located to the north of Grebieten, near the former Palmnicken (today Jantarny), where amber mining is still conducted.

² Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz.

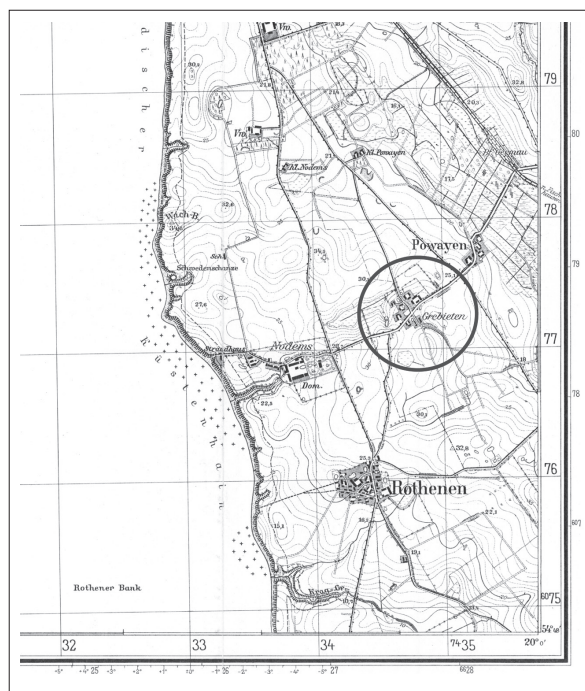


Fig. 1. The location of the Grebieten burial ground on a prewar topographical map TK 25 (1:25000), the Messtischblatt 1185 Palmnicken.

The geographical location and characteristics of the landscape

The Grebieten burial ground is located on the western coast of the Sambian Peninsula by the River Primorskaja (formerly Germauer Mühlenfließ), between the settlements of Grebieten, Kreis Fischhausen and Sacherau, Kreis Fischhausen (today Morozovka, Zelenogradskii district) (Fig. 1). The burial site lies on the western edge of a moraine hills area, in the broad valley of the above-mentioned river, and only two kilometres east of the coast of the Baltic Sea; the height of the area reaches 47 metres above sea level in the Baltic coordinates system. The burial ground is now a matted meadow on hilly terrain, which until recently was used for agricultural purposes (a ploughed field). The landscape preserves these traits on almost all the terrain between the River Primorskaja and the Baltic coast. The soil in the area is sandy; however, its high acidity makes the preservation of organic materials in the cultural layer a unique event.

At this point, it should also be mentioned that the River Primorskaja, which runs into the Primorskaja inlet in the Vistula Bay (formerly Frisches Haff) in the Baltic Sea, belongs nowadays to the minor rivers of the peninsula's river network. However, it and its tributaries were much fuller in ancient times, and probably represented an important part of the water transport and communication infrastructure.

History of the research: the prewar period

Several prewar excavations were performed on the Grebieten burial ground. Their current state of documentation, and accordingly our relevant knowledge concerning the results of these research campaigns, differ to a great degree.

A burial ground near Grebieten was mentioned for the first time in the periodical of the Königsberg Society of Antiquity Prussia *Sitzungsberichte der Altertumsgeellschaft Prussia* as early as 1882 (Bujack 1883, 128).

Shortly after the first prehistoric artefacts from Grebieten were given by amateur excavators to the Prussia Museum in Königsberg in 1881–1883, the first professional excavations were performed on the monument. The archaeological monument was investigated for the first time at the end of the 19th century by the Prussian archaeologists Georg Bujack, Johannes Heydeck and the Prussia Society members, Eckart and Albert Foß, who during two field trips in 1884 and 1886 investigated at least 485 burials in the 'northern' and 'southern' parts of the monument (Bujack 1888a, 174–181, Tab. IV–VI, 1888b, 202–255, 1888b, 181ff., Tab. VII–IX). The results of these excavations were published in the above-mentioned periodical. These field reports currently represent the main, the most detailed, and in fact almost the only published sources of information. The finds catalogue was accompanied by a schematic excavation plan of the investigated areas of the burial ground (Bujack 1888a, 1888b, Tab. III.a, III.b). According to modern accessions, based on the published excavation plans, the total examined area should constitute approximately 70 by 25 metres (Efremov, Skvortsov 2017, forthcoming). The excavated burials represented urn-cremations and pit-cremations,³ and were dated to the chronological periods C, D and H (Hollack 1908, 44). However, according to modern knowledge, some of the finds should be dated to phase B_{2b}.⁴

Archaeological investigations of the monument were continued in 1903 (?) by Emil Hollack, and in 1907 by Adalbert Bezenberger and Emil Hollack (SMB-PK/MVF, PM-IX d 1, PM-Archive, 406/2, 8–16, 19–46). Single pictures and notes in the archives of the Prussia Museum (SMB-PK/MVF, PM-IX d 1, PM-Archive 406/2, 2ff.) indicate that further test pits were dug in

³ In the case of the 'Knochendepots', the calcined bones were deposited in the grave in an organic container (such as a textile bag or a box made of bark). The latter is often not detectable in the grave any more; however, its former existence can be confirmed by the tight conglomeration of the bones in the burial.

⁴ It should be mentioned, of course, that the field reports referred to come nowhere near modern research standards.

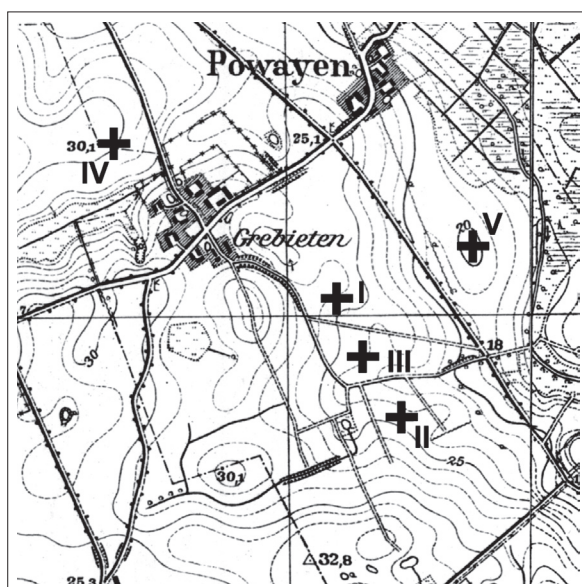


Fig. 2. The location of the burial ground areas excavated in the prewar research period. Preliminary reconstruction based on published field reports and archival records: I-III excavations performed in 1884, 1886 (periods C, D and H) (Bujack 1888a, 174-181, 1888b, 202-255; Heydeck 1888b, 181ff.); IV-V excavations performed in 1903 (?) and 1907 (Period H) (Hollack 1908, 44; SMB-PK/MVF, PM-IX d 1, PM-A 406/21).

the burial ground in the 1920s and 1930s, while numerous stray finds were also collected. Unfortunately, the results of the field walking survey and archaeological excavations which took place in the first half of the 20th century to a great extent remain unclear, as neither field reports nor corresponding catalogues of finds have been published. However, the research data gathered during the 1907 field walking survey and archaeological excavations can be partially reconstructed on the basis of the archive records of the former Prussia Museum, as well as artefacts from the remnants of its collection. Besides the original preserved artefacts, there is another specific, but at the same time reliable, source of information: sheets of cardboard to which the finds were originally attached for preservation and/or exhibition, revealing the 'shadows' of objects on their surface (see also Prassolow 2009, 265). These 'shadows' emerged through the long-term exposure of these sheets of cardboard to sunlight, in combination with natural dust sedimentation, and nowadays in many cases they represent the only reflection of archaeological finds which are either lost or cannot currently be identified in the large amount of artefacts from the Prussia collection with missing inventory numbers.

According to modern knowledge, at least 116 burials should have been investigated during the expedition in 1907. It is probable that the short reference of an area with cremation burials (Period H) to the north of the

earlier investigated territory of the monument, which was investigated in the 19th century, as well as further burial zones on both sides of the border between the Grebieten and Klein-Powayen estates (dated to the periods C and D) (Hollack 1908, 44), should be related to the areas excavated in the 20th century (Fig. 2).

The total number of burials excavated in the prewar research period by archaeologists should be estimated as high as 600. These burials represent cremations with or without urns, with their stone pavements usually partially destroyed by ploughing, while some of the excavated burials have already been robbed (Skvortsov 2014; Efremov, Skvortsov 2017, forthcoming). The results of the analysis of the grave inventory allow us to date the burial complexes to the Late Roman Iron Age (period C), the Migration Period (period D), and to the Late Heathen Age (period H) (Hollack 1908, 44). As has already been mentioned, some of the remaining artefacts should be dated to period B, i.e. to phase B_{2b}.

History of the research: the postwar period

The Second World War and the Cold War that followed it led to a dramatic decrease in the total number of archaeological investigations performed in the former East Prussia. A combination of negative factors, such as the disappearance of the whole collection and archives of the Prussia Museum in Königsberg in the final days of the Second World War, as well as the rapid change of the archaeological school in the former East Prussia, which after the war was divided between Poland and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, just to name the most important of them, led to long-term stagnation in the research of local antiquities. As a result, the archaeological heritage of Sambian-Natangian culture gradually almost faded away from the archaeological map of Europe and the minds of the postwar generation of scholars. The Grebieten burial ground was also not exception to this rule. The first attempts to perform an analysis of the prewar archaeological material from Grebieten were made by Polish researchers. The Polish archaeologist Jan Jaskanis referred to Grebieten in his publication devoted to burial monuments of the Roman Iron Age (Jaskanis 1977, 272ff.). However, a milestone in the postwar investigations of the Grebieten burial ground was set by the publication by Professor Wojciech Nowakowski, a renowned scholar of the archaeological heritage of the West Balts (Nowakowski 1996, 22ff., Tables 35-47). In his detailed multilateral study, Professor Nowakowski performed a modern analysis of the prewar archaeological material from the former East Prussia, and reinspected a number of grave inventories from the Grebieten burial ground. Although this

was an important step in the investigation of Grebieten, and of Sambian-Natangian culture on the whole, this interpretation was based on the old descriptions of grave complexes published in the 19th century (Bujack 1888a, 174-181, 1888b, 202-255; Heydeck 1888, 181ff.), and was thus limited by their quality.

In the 1980s, land reclamation work was performed on the area of the burial ground, which led to the destruction of numerous burial complexes (Skvortsov 2014). Unfortunately, no further details concerning the total number of disturbed burials or the composition of their inventories have so far could have been clarified. After a long break, professional archaeological field investigations were continued on the burial ground a few years ago (see below).

Modern analysis of old materials

New opportunities to reinvestigate the results of old excavations in the whole area of Sambian-Natangian culture using modern research methods arose mainly as a number of information sources, believed to have been either lost or destroyed in the Second World War, were rediscovered in the 1990s. The most important of these are the remnants of the collection and the archive of the Prussia Museum, found in the 1990s in both Berlin and Kaliningrad (Adlung et al. 2005; Reich 2003, 2004/05, 2009; Reich, Menghin 2008; Valuev 2008; Kulakov 2009b). The majority of the preserved field reports, descriptions of archaeological monuments, complexes and single finds, drawings, photographs, excavation plans and schemes, as well as the original artefacts, have never been published before, and thus possess a research potential which can hardly be overestimated. Besides this, another type of data source, namely the private archives of European scholars who worked in the former East Prussia before 1945, became accessible again in the 1990s. The most important of these sources are the archives of Marta Schmiedehelm (preserved in the Institute of History [AI] at Tallinn University), Felix Jakobson (preserved in the National History Museum of Latvia), Otto Tischler (preserved in the Olsztyn Museum of Warmia and Masuria), Martin Jahn (Institute of Archaeology at the University of Warsaw), and Rudolf Grenz and Herbert Jankuhn (Archaeological Museum of the German federal land Schleswig-Holstein (ALM), Schleswig, palace Gottorf). These archives either contain unique observations made by the researchers during their inspections of the original finds in the Prussia collection, or alternatively they represent information copied by researchers in the archive of the Prussia Museum.⁵ These two sorts

of data complement each other, as well as fill in gaps in the field reports published in the 19th century. Besides, at least 1,241 artefacts originating from the Grebieten burial ground are still present in the Berlin part of the Prussia collection (with further objects preserved in Kaliningrad and Olsztyn), while numerous archival records concerning excavations performed on the site in the 19th century are preserved in the archive of the Prussia Museum.

The current situation with information sources is thus obviously the best one since 1945, and in turn allows for the opportunity of the possibly full reconstruction of the prewar state of research, and a more up-to-date analysis of the old archaeological material. The rediscovery of the above-mentioned prewar sources also makes the modern critical analysis of currently existing research concepts and hypotheses possible. At this point, it is necessary to mention that the first preliminary comparative analysis of the corresponding published material, archival records and preserved grave inventories showed the often striking incompleteness of the previously published descriptions. At the same time, the results of the analysis confirmed the high potential of the applied approach for the (at least partial) reconstruction of the prewar state of knowledge. The potential of comparative analysis in the case of antiquities of Sambian-Natangian culture can be demonstrated by the following empirical examples.

The modern analysis of male warrior grave inventories from the Grebieten burial ground (excavated in 1844, 1886 and 1907) demonstrated considerable deviations between the constitution of the grave inventories as published in 1888, and as can be reconstructed on the basis of the remaining archival records.

Burial No 15(S)⁶ is described in the published excavation report as follows:

‘Grave 15. Male grave, calcined human bones deposit (“Knochendepot”), ceramic vessels (1). Grave goods: bronze buckle (2) with fitting; fragment of a bronze fibula bow (3), long iron knife with grooves on the part of the blade close to its back (4), small iron knife (5), iron spearhead (6), three iron fragments (7)’ (Bujack 1888b, 238).

Additional artefact descriptions and sketches were found in the archive of M. Schmiedehelm (folder F9.23), as well as in the archive of F. Jakobson. Further important observations were made on the preserved original finds from the collection of the Prussia Museum (Fig. 3a-c). The grave goods from burial No 15(S) (PM Inv. No IV.203.5416) can be attributed to the

⁵ These copies allow *inter alia* the reconstruction of the (in many cases) no longer existing original records.

⁶ The letter S here stands for the ‘southern part’ of the excavated area of the Grebieten burial ground.

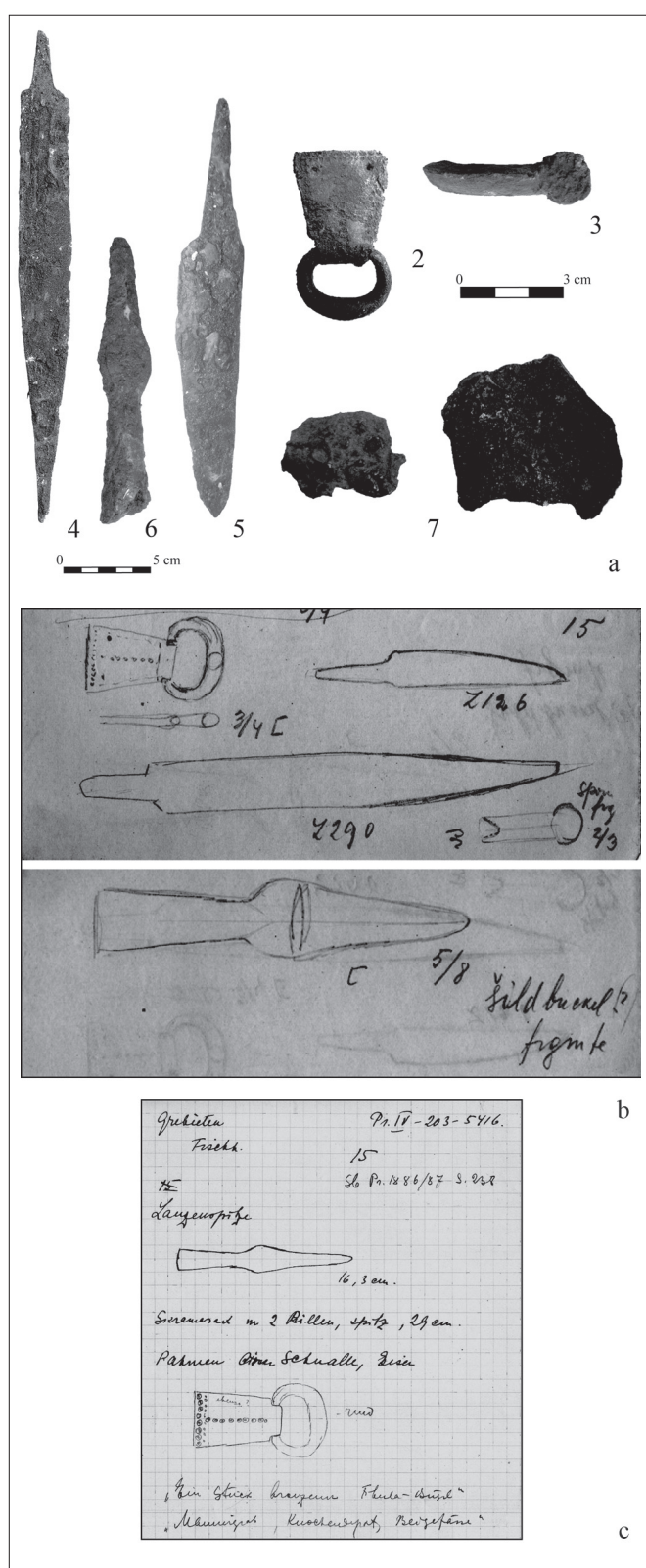


Fig. 3a-c. Inventory of burial No 15 (S): a the surviving grave goods, currently preserved in the MVF (photographs by C. Plamp (4,6) and J. Prassolow); b depiction of the artefacts in the archive of M. Schmiedehelm (folder F9.23); c a depiction of the artefacts in the archive of F. Jakobson.

following types of modern classification: 1 ceramic vessels, quantity and type unknown; 2 bronze buckle-like ring-eyelet with fitting, special type (after Prassolow 2017, forthcoming); 3 fragments of a bronze spur, group VIII (after Godłowski 1970), i.e. type Type H (after Ginalska 1991); 4 knife-dagger, type Type 2 (after Prassolow 2017, forthcoming); 5 small iron knife; 6 iron lance head, type II (after Kazakevičius 1988); 7 fragments of a shield boss, the type of which could not be specified. According to the results of the grave inventory analysis, burial 15(S) should be dated to phases D₂–D₃.

The example of burial No 15 demonstrates how an originally short and rather general description can be corrected and specified through the analysis of additional sources of information, which in turn leads to a more precise reconstruction of the grave inventory composition, as well as allowing for its possibly precise dating.

The next example shows a different case, as burial No 4 was investigated within the framework of the excavations conducted in 1907, of which the results were never published (Fig. 4a-b). However, the composition of the grave inventory remained fixed in archival records (at least at first glance):

‘4) In burnt soil on the sand 30 centimetres under the surface of the ground, a fragmented urn (1) was found, a lance head (2) and a short sword (3) were lying next to it, a D-shaped buckle (4) was lying between the [calcined] bones’ (Archive of the Prussia Museum, SMB-PK/MVF, PM-IX d 1, PM-Archive 406/1, 20). Of the four grave goods mentioned above, only the D-shaped buckle could be reidentified in the remains of the Prussia collection. However, the ‘shadows’ on the preserved original sheet of cardboard point out that the grave goods should have been much more numerous. This conclusion is also supported by additional data found in the archives of F. Jakobson and M. Schmiedehelm (order F9.23), as well as from the archive of R. Grenz. According to the results of an analysis of these sources of information,⁷ the list of grave goods should be extended by 24 (!) positions. Thus, the grave inventory included: 1 funeral urn, type cannot yet

⁷ The composition of the grave inventory differs to a certain extent, depending on the source.

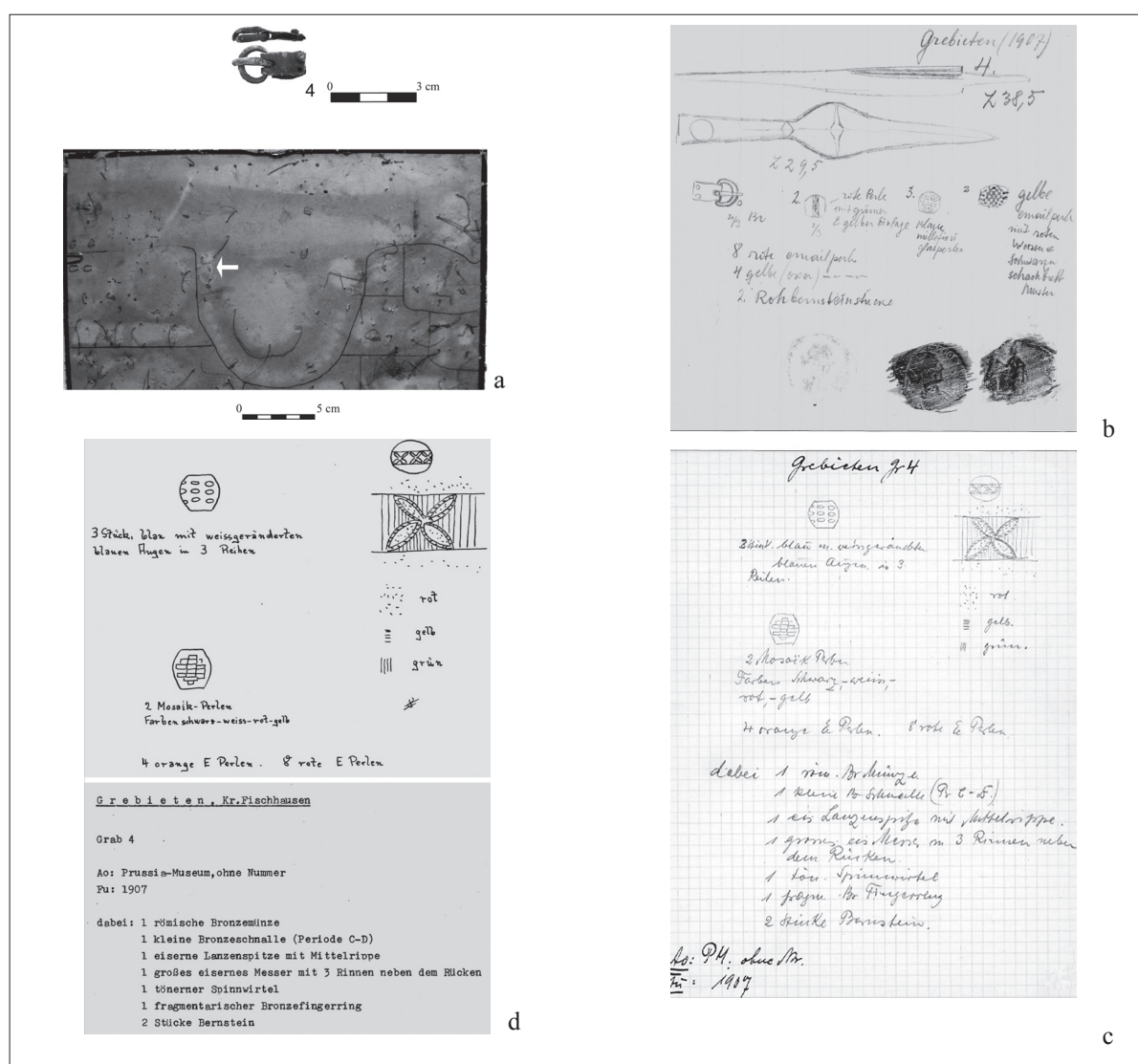


Fig. 4a-d. Inventory of burial No 4 (1907): a surviving belt buckle (MVF) (scale 1:1), and the 'shadows' of artefacts on the original sheet of cardboard from the Prussia Museum (scale 1:2) (photograph by J. Prassolow); b-d depiction of the artefacts in the archive of F. Jakobson, M. Schmiedehelm (folder F9.23) and of R. Grenz, respectively.

be specified; 2 lance head, type II (after Kazakevičius 1988); 3 knife-dagger of 'classic' form, type 2 (3a?) (after Prassolow 2017, forthcoming); 4 small bronze buckle with a rectangular fitting and two rivets, similar to type H16 (after Madyda-Legutko 1986); 5-6 two red glass beads, with red, green and yellow inlays, type TM 356a; 7-9 three blue Millefiori glass beads with three rows of eyes, type TM225a; 10-11 two yellow mosaic beads with a black-white-red chess pattern, type TM366d; 12-19 eight red enamel beads, type unknown; 20-23 four yellow glass beads, type unknown (bead types after Tempelmann-Maczyńska 1985); 24-25 two pieces of raw amber; 26 bronze Roman coins, minted in the time of Commodus for Bruttia Crispina (d. 183), type RIC 672b (after Mattingly, Sydenham 1930), 27 ceramic spindle whorls; 28 fragmented bronze finger-ring, type not yet specified.

According to the results of the analysis of the grave inventory, burial No 4 should be dated to phases D₂-D₃, while some of the artefacts dated to the Roman Iron Age should have been out of use already for a long time, as they were deposited in the burial as grave goods. Of course, it cannot be completely excluded that finds Nos 5-28 originate from another excavated burial, and were later mixed up with artefacts from burial No 4; this possibility currently seems to be more probable, but requires additional investigation.

The cases described above demonstrate clearly how incomplete even the published descriptions from the prewar research period can be, and how urgent the necessity is to reinvestigate old material using additional data sources available nowadays and a broad range of modern approaches and natural science research methods. At this point, it is worth mentioning that the situation with the old excavation material from

Dollkeim, another reference monument in the area of Sambian-Natangian culture, is unfortunately in no way better. Only 106 out of altogether 250 burials (periods B-H) which were excavated by O. Tischler in 1879 were published in the following years (Tischler 1880, 81, 1891, 103; Kemke 1901; Tischler, Kemke 1902), while even the published descriptions of the grave inventories often end with ‘... and further’ [finds], which as the results of the preliminary comparative analysis with other sources of information (mainly archival records) show, can ‘hide’ numerous undescribed finds. This observation additionally supports the thesis that modern knowledge of the prewar-period research results contains numerous gaps, and requires reinspection.

Modern excavations

While it is true that the old excavation material from Grebieten still has a big research potential, and its investigation is far from being finished, many open questions can be answered only through fieldwalking survey and archaeological excavations. The most topical are questions concerning the borders of the Grebieten burial ground, the interposition of the areas excavated in 1884, 1886 and 1907, and their functional relationship. It has not yet been demonstrably shown whether burial groups excavated in the vicinity of Grebieten represent socially or chronologically defined burial zones of one archaeological monument, or whether we are dealing instead with a group of contemporary burial fields.

In 2012 and 2013, the Sambian Archaeological Expedition of the Institute of Archaeology of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IA RAN) performed archaeological surveys in regions of intensive modern agricultural work in the Zelenogradskii district of the Kaliningrad region of Russia. These surveys were also part of the research programme ‘Amber in Ancient Cultures’ initiated by the Kaliningrad Regional Museum of Amber, focusing on the investigation of burial grounds from the Roman Iron Age and the Migration Period. The main goal of the investigation was the rediscovery and inventorisation of objects of the archaeological heritage which were already known in the prewar period of research, but which for various reasons are currently not on the official register of archaeological monuments protected by the Russian state.

Archaeological surveys were performed inter alia on the Okunevo (formerly Grebieten) burial ground and in its immediate vicinity (Skvortsov 2014). It should be mentioned that the Grebieten burial ground is so far not on the register of archaeological monuments of the Kaliningrad region; its official rediscovery by

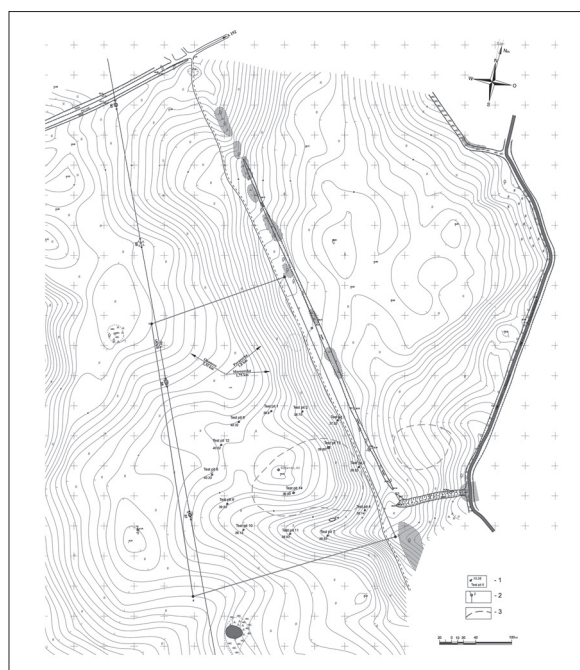


Fig. 5. Archaeological surveys conducted by the Sambian Archaeological Expedition in 2012 and 2013: test pits (1), borders of the archaeological monument (2) and concentrations of stray finds (3) on the Okunevo/Grebieten burial ground (situation plan by V. Shabunin).



Fig. 6. Test pit No 13: the excavation trench detected and the remains of plundered urn cremations (photograph by K. Skvortsov).

the Sambian Archaeological Expedition took place in the spring of 2013. Localization of the burial ground in the field was preceded by an analysis of the corresponding publications and archival records. This step was made in close cooperation with the long-term research project ‘Continuity of Research and Research of Continuity. Basic Research on Settlement Archaeology of the Iron Age in the Baltic Region’ of the Academy of Sciences and Literature in Mainz, per-

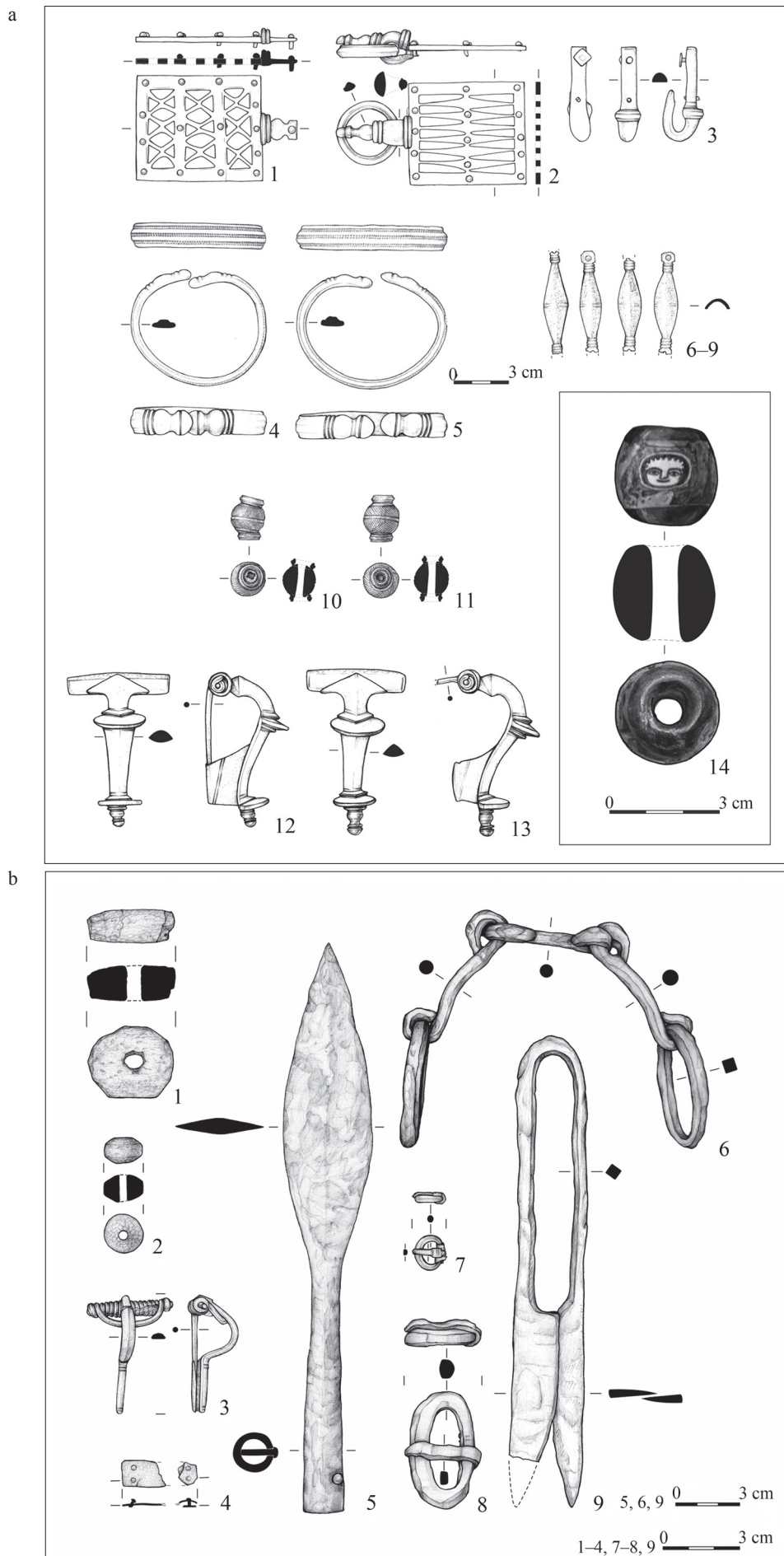


Fig. 7a-b.
Archaeological
objects discovered
in the Grebieten
burial ground
during excavations
and archaeological
surveys in
2012-2013:
a grave goods
from the destroyed
inhumations.
Early Roman Age
(Period B);
b goods from
the excavated rider
and horse graves
(No 5, 6).
Migration period
(Period D)
(photograph by
K. Skvortsov,
drawings by
N. Timoshenko).

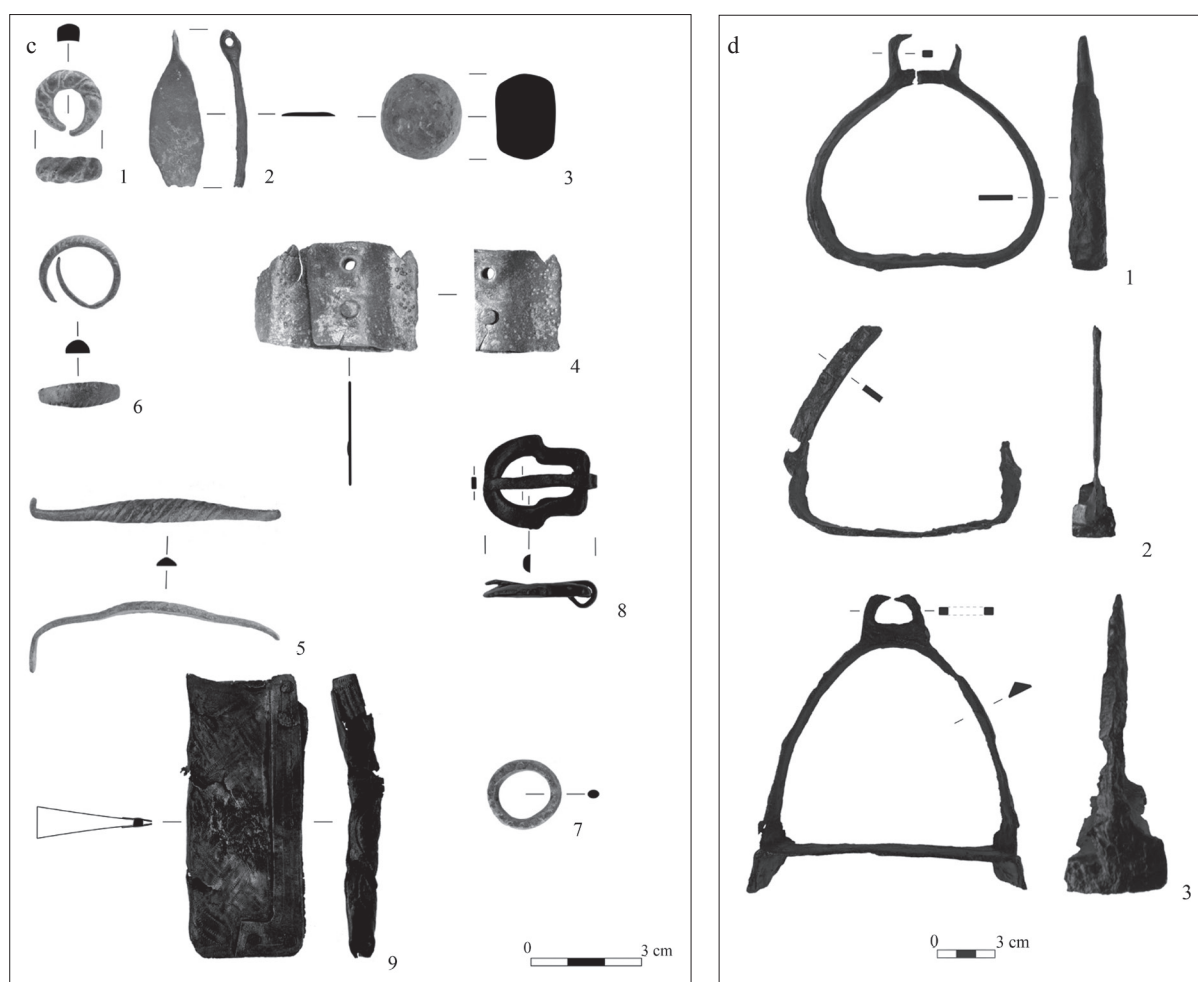


Fig. 7c-d. Archaeological objects discovered in the Grebieten burial ground during excavations and archaeological surveys in 2012-2013: c stray finds in the ploughed horizon from the late zone of the burial ground, 11th-beginning of the 13th century AD; d stirrup stray finds in the ploughed horizon from the late zone of the burial ground, 11th -12th century AD (photograph by K. Skvortsov, drawings by N. Timoshenko).

formed by researchers from the Centre for Baltic and Scandinavian Archaeology (ZBSA) in Schleswig and the Museum of Prehistory (MVF) and Early History in Berlin (von Carnap-Bornheim et al. 2012). The inspected rectangular survey area measured 800 metres along a north-south axis, and 600 metres west-east. In the north, the border of the area was formed by the old field road from the former Grebieten to Nodems (today wasteland in the Zelenogradskii district). To the south, the border lay 20 metres south of a small pond; in the east, it was formed by the River Primorskaja; while the western border lay 80 metres to the west of an electricity transmission line. The area of the monument bore traces of the activities of grave robbers: more than 100 illegally dug test pits were detected. Numerous stray finds can be dated to the period from the second to the 13th century AD. Within the framework of the archaeological survey, two major find concentrations were revealed in the area between the 'northern' and the 'southern' areas of Grebieten, excavated in the 19th

century. Besides this, 14 test pits altogether, forming a circular structure, were dug in the area of the western concentration of finds (Fig. 5). Two of these test pits (Nos 13 and 14), with a common area of 20 square metres, contained six burials altogether (one inhumation and five cremations), dated to the third – fifth century AD. According to the results of the archaeological survey, and of the test-pits, no find-free zone was identified between the 'northern' and the 'southern' area, which implies that they probably represent two burial zones of one and the same archaeological site, instead of being two independent monuments. Test-pitting led to further exciting results: in test pit 13, a part of an old excavation trench, with enlargements around the rest of the burials, was detected, while empty ceramic urns still remained in the places of their original deposition. Only a few amber beads were found around the urns; the rest of the grave goods were gone (Fig. 6). Obviously, in this case, we are dealing with the remaining traces of amateur (1881–1883?) or even professional

excavations from the prewar research period. Alternatively, the urn cremations in question might have been robbed by locals in the Middle Ages. If the corresponding burials had indeed been unearthed within the framework of prewar professional excavations (1884, 1886 or 1907), a further question arises as to whether these ceramic vessels were registered in the field documentation, and later on mentioned in published (?) field reports. Whatever the case may be, it is clear that only future excavations of a larger scale can give an answer to these and other questions, and finally enable reconstruction of the localization of the areas excavated before 1945.

Last but not least, some of the grave goods from the inhumations, destroyed in the mid-2000s by agricultural work, were given to the researchers conducting the survey by local residents. These costume elements and ornaments, some of them without any doubt imported goods, allow us to date the inhumations to phase B2. The in frames of the field investigations of the burial complexes excavated, as well as the collected stray finds, allows us to date the monument to periods B-D, H (Fig. 7a-d).

Open questions and future research goals

To summarise the above, as well as defining further research goals, two sets of questions should be addressed in the future. While the first set is made up of research questions dealing with the Grebieten burial ground itself, the questions of the second 'external' set concern the identification of localities and the role of the monument in the more complex archaeological context.

A prerequisite for progress in research in the case of Grebieten is the possibly complete reconstruction of the prewar state of knowledge, and its subsequent completion with data from all currently available sources of information.

That said, a complete inventory of the Grebieten finds from the remnants of the Königsberg Prussia collection (the museums of Berlin, Kaliningrad and Olsztyn) should be performed, while at the same time, records from the archives of the Prussia Museum and from private prewar researchers' archives should be sorted out and evaluated. Once a comparative analysis of the available sources of information has been performed, our idea of the composition principles of grave inventories will become clearer, and a solid basis for the further and more complex analysis of the archaeological data will be created.

Parallel with the investigation of the archaeological material from the Grebieten burial ground, further field research should be conducted, in order to determine the limits of the prewar excavation areas, their mutual spatial and chronological interposition, and the external borders of the monument. The important question of whether the already-excavated areas represent burial zones of one and the same huge archaeological monument, or, though less probable, whether they should be viewed as a tight conglomeration of several burial grounds, has not been addressed in the literature so far.

Only once the spatial and chronological structures of the burial monument are clarified will it make sense, and in fact become possible, to attempt a reconstruction of its social structure. In this context, it should be mentioned that, until now, not a single burial ground in the whole area of Sambian-Natangian culture has been completely excavated and published. This means that the currently available information concerning the grave inventories is not only incomplete (see above), but is also selective in the context of the whole monument, as long as hundreds and thousands of burials in the Grebieten burial ground remain uninvestigated. This fact has a strong negative impact on all attempts made so far to reconstruct the social stratification of the Sambian-Natangian culture community, which is based on the results of an analysis of the archaeological material.

The questions of the second set have their roots in a new⁸ research hypothesis, according to which Grebieten should be seen not only as a single burial ground, but instead as part of a much larger archaeological settlement complex. The results of the modern analysis of old archival records, as well as of the modern archaeological surveys in the region, imply that the Grebieten burial ground belongs to a broad belt of burial grounds situated along the Baltic coast, between the former settlements of Sorgenau (today Pokrowskoje, Zelenogradskii district) and Gaffken, Kreis Fischhausen (today Parusnoje, Zelenogradskii district). This 1.5-kilometre-wide belt is formed by numerous Roman Iron Age and Migration Period burial grounds, five kilometres at the most from the sea in the basin of the River Primorskaja. According to the published data (Hollack 1908, site map; Engel, La Baume 1937, 261, 268), at least 13 Roman Iron Age burial sites were discovered in the prewar research period along the eight-kilometre-long riverhead section of the Primorskaya (total length 15 kilometres).

Information about four further burial monuments can be found in the archival records from this time,

⁸ New in the local archaeological context.

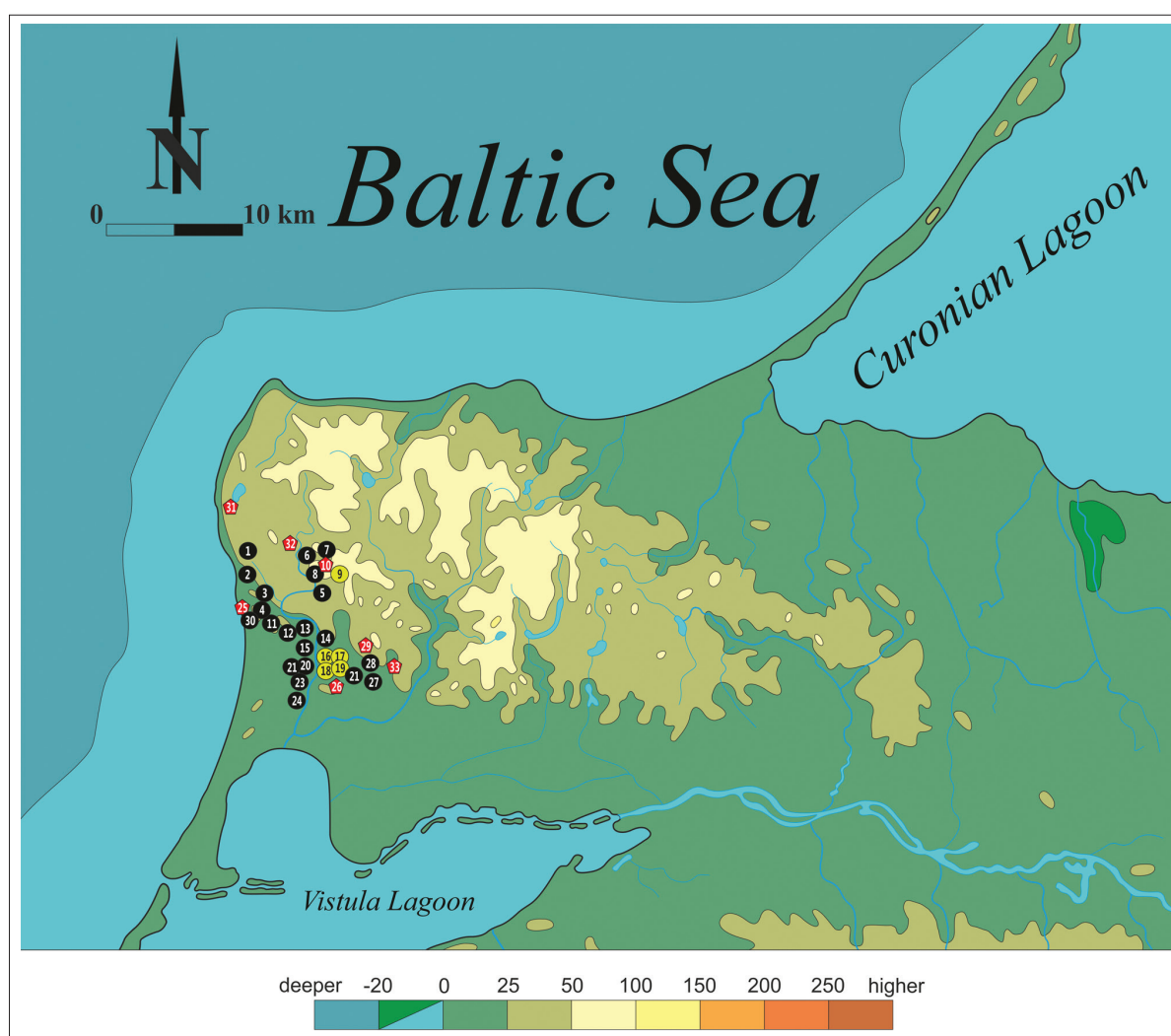


Fig. 8. Schematic representation of the distribution of the currently known Roman Iron Age and Migration Period archaeological monuments on the western coast of the Sambian Peninsula: 1 Sorgenau/Pokrovskoje; 2 Lesnicken; 3 Klein Powayen/Povarovka; 4 Grebieten/Okunevo; 5 Kirpehnen/Povarovka; 6 Germau/Russkoje; 7 Galgenberg near Germau/Russkoje; 8 Kirpehnen (Lüdorf)/Povarovka; 9 Germau/Russkoje; 10 Klein Hause (Schwedenschanze)/ Russkoje; 11–13 burial grounds near Grebieten/Okunevo; 14 Sacherau/Morozovka; 15 Sacherau-2 (Krüger)/Morozovka; 16–17 Morozovka-1 and 2; 18 Putilovo, 19 Putilovo-2; 20–21 Korjeiten-1 and -2; 22 Gauten/Putilovo-1; 23 Nöpkeim/Parusnoje; 24 Gaffken/Parusnoje; 25 Nodems/Okunevo; 26 Godnicken/Kruglovo; 27 Polehnen/Kruglovo; 28 Ellerhaus/Kruglovo; 29 Ellerhaus; 30 Nodems/Okunevo; 31 Kraxteppellen/Jantarnoje; 32 Gross Hausen, 33 Spinnerhaus. Legend: 1–8, 11–15, 19–24, 27, 28, 30 burial grounds; 9, 16–18 – open settlements; 10, 25, 26, 29, 31–33 – hill-forts; black circles – sites known before 1945; light grey circles – recently discovered monuments; pentagons – hill-forts.

with the total number of burial sites known until 1945 coming to 17, and with the distance between single monuments in some cases being less than one kilometre. In spite of such a high density of monuments, four other Roman Iron Age burial sites might have been found in the micro-region within the framework of modern surveys, with the total number thus coming to at least 21 (Fig. 8) (Skvortsov 2014).

The existence of the described complex of burial monuments,⁹ and correspondingly the comparatively high population density during the Roman Iron Age

and Migration Period in this area, can be explained by its closeness to the coastal areas, where amber was traditionally collected,¹⁰ as well as to a section of the water trade route (the River Primorskaja) from Sambia to the Vistula estuary (Skvorzov 2013b, 360).¹¹ As has

atic coast, although many of these monuments continued functioning well into the second millennium AD.

¹⁰ Indeed, the concentration of burial grounds discussed is located in an area of amber deposits on the western coast of the Sambian Peninsula, of which the natural border in the east is formed by the Alk Ridge, while in the south it is marked by an imaginary line between the former settlement of Nodems and Kauster Hill.

¹¹ It should also be mentioned in this context that two of the seven known major places of amber collection described by Caspar Schütz in 1592 in the *Prussian chronicle*

⁹ The archaeologically dated appearance and functioning of these burial grounds correlates with the time of the existence of the 'Amber Road', a trade route which started at the Sambian Peninsula and ended in Aquileia on the Adri-

been mentioned, one of the four assumed centres of administration and power on the Sambian Peninsula should have been situated on its western coast in the close vicinity of the burial fields mentioned, which were probably part of its infrastructure. It is logical to assume that in the times of the amber trade discussed, not only burial fields, but also open settlements, hill-forts and other elements of a functional infrastructure should have existed in this area. In full accordance with this assumption, we currently know of several hill-forts and open settlements, which, judging by their geographical position and preliminary dating results, should also have belonged to one functional complex with the burial grounds in question.

Modern archaeological surveys conducted by the Sambian Archaeological Expedition have led to the detection of at least four Roman Iron Age open settlements in this area. The real number of these monuments in the micro-region, as well as on the whole of the Sambian Peninsula, is currently unknown, as before 1945, and until recently, their detection was not a research priority.

The special role of the area in question as a centre of administration and power is further emphasised by the high number of hill-forts, most of which were already known before 1945. The following hill-forts should have belonged to the settlement complex: the no longer extant hill-fort at Kraxteppelin, to the north of the former Palmnicken (today Jantarny); the hill-forts at Groß Hausen and Klein Hausen, near the former settlement of Germau, Kreis Samland (today Russkoje); the hill-fort at Nodems, situated right on the sea shore; the hill-fort at Godniken, near modern Kruglovo; Klein Hausen, situated near the former Krattlau; and the hill-forts at Spinnerhaus and Ellerhaus (Fig. 8).

It is currently believed that most of the above-mentioned hill-forts were founded no earlier than the middle of the first millennium AD (Suvorov 1984, 66). However, most of the monuments have never been properly investigated, so there is no evidence that the actual hill-forts were not built over already-existing much older unfortified or fortified settlements, i.e. they did not have several construction phases.

Conclusions

The main goal of this article is to reintroduce the Grebieten burial ground into scientific research, and to attract

the reader's attention to this archaeological monument, which significance and research potential seem to be underestimated today. Finally, the authors advocate quite a new view on the burial ground in question: instead of its further investigation as a single monument, a much more complex interpretation is proposed. The combined results of prewar and modern archaeological studies strongly suggest that the Grebieten burial site belongs to a large settlement complex on the western coast of the Sambian Peninsula. The development of this settlement complex with a complex infrastructure (burial grounds, open settlements and hill-forts) can best be understood in the context of the collection and trade in amber in the micro-region during the Roman Iron Age and Migration Period. The settlement complex (with Grebieten as its reference point) probably had the function of a local administrative and power centre. That said, it should be pointed out that an archaeological analysis of the historical and functional interconnection of the prehistoric monuments in question has never been performed for this area before, and thus it represents an innovative scientific approach in the local context. The multilateral investigation of the archaeological settlement complex has a crucial significance for our knowledge of the material and historical heritage of Sambian-Natangian culture during the Roman Iron Age and Migration Period, for the actualisation of the current understanding of the local settlement system, the organisation of the Sambian-Natangian culture community, and specific features of everyday life, and, in the long term, for an understanding of the complex socio-historical processes which took place at the origins of the 'Amber Road'.

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Historia Rerum Prussicarum refer to this micro-region: one place is located between the former Sorgenau (today Pokrovskoje) and Palmnicken (today Jantarny), and the other is situated near the former Nodems (Schlicht 1922, 389ff., 408).

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APIE GRAIBYČIŲ (GREBIETEN) KAPINYNŲ REIKŠMĘ IR TYRIMUS. PRIEŠKARINIŲ TYRIMŲ REKONSTRUKCIJA IR MODERNIŲ TYRIMŲ PERSPEKTYVA

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Santrumpa

Svarbiausias publikacijos tikslas – grąžinti Graibyčių (*Greibieten*) kapinyną į mokslinių tyrimų sferą ir atkreipti skaitytojų dėmesį į šį archeologinį paminklą, kurio reikšmė ir turima medžiaga šiandien, regis, nepakankamai vertinama (1–7 pav.). Nepaisant rimtų ankstesnių tyrinėjimo problemų ir žinių spragų, šiandieniniai tarptautiniai tyrimai suteikia unikalią galimybę atkurti paminklo prieškarinio tyrimų pasiekimus ir įvertinti juos iš naujo. Mišrus prieškarinio ir dabartinių archeologinių tyrimų rezultatas ypač pabrėžia būtinybę vertinti Graibyčių kapinyną kaip Sembos pusiasalio vakarinės pakrantės didelio gyvenviečių kompleksą dalį. Gali būti, kad gyvenviečių kompleksas (su Graibyčiais kaip atskaitos tašku) buvo vietinis administracinis ir jėgos centras. Įvairiapusiai archeologiniai gyvenviečių komplekso tyrinėjimai turi lemiamą reikšmę mūsų žinioms apie materialų ir istorinį Dollkeimo-Kovrovo, arba Sembos-Notangos, kultūros romėniškojo ir tautų kraustymosi laikotarpių palikimą.